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FOR NEA, PM AND ISN

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VOICES U.S. DISAPPOINTMENT AT KUWAIT  
PULLING OUT OF OBSERVING PSI EXERCISE LEADING EDGE

REF: KUWAIT 04265

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Taking advantage of opportunities to speak separately to the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and Foreign Minister on the margins of other events on 1 November, I expressed U.S. disappointment on the cancellation by Kuwait of its agreement to observe the recent PSI Leading Edge exercise in Bahrain. I told these senior officials we were disappointed for two reasons: 1) the cancellation in the face of Iranian pressure sent exactly the wrong signal to an Iranian regime intent on bullying its neighbors, and 2) as close allies, Kuwait and the U.S. should not take actions that surprise each other, as did the cancellation by Kuwait. In response, I got some pretty lame excuses about not being well-informed on the exercise in advance. (In fact the Armed Forces Chief of Staff approved attendance by three Kuwaiti officers, but it appears that the political noise the Iranians generated resulted in some GOK dissimulation about who knew what when.)

¶2. (S) I told the Kuwaiti leaders that my purpose was not to focus on the past, but to avoid repeat of such problems as we move ahead in a serious way to confront security challenges in the Gulf. In that vein, I noted the need to focus promptly on the paper I had sent over that day to the Foreign Minister on next steps in the Gulf Security Dialogue. I also agreed to make sure that the political level is fully briefed on future PSI exercises. (We sent PSI background material to the Foreign Minister at his request.) The Defense Minister was the most forward leaning about the need for Kuwait to participate in future exercises.

¶3. (S) Comment: The GOK will continue to try to strike a balance between its support for the U.S. security umbrella in the region and avoidance of actions that provoke their big and powerful neighbor. For example, the Amir told visiting Gen. Colin Powell last week that he had agreed to visit Iran in the future, while also saying that none of the bilateral issues between them had been resolved. GCC Foreign and Defense Ministers will be meeting over the course of the next month to prepare for the December 8-9 GCC summit. What to do about Iran will certainly be on their minds.

¶4. (S) Comment, continued: I also spoke to Ambassador Salem Al-Sabah, who came to Kuwait on the inaugural United flight from Dulles. In addition to repeating the points about the Leading Edge cancellation, I suggested he meet A/S Hillen upon his return to go over our ideas for the GSD, noting the urgency of getting GOK agreement to at least some of the ideas in the U.S. paper.  
LeBaron